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The Effect of Dislike on Accuracy and Bias in Person Perception

Johannes Zimmermann[1], Simon Schindler[2], Geraldine Klaus[2], and Daniel Leising[3]

Abstract

The present work explores how accuracy and bias in person perception change with the level of liking that the perceiver holds toward the target person. Specifically, we studied whether dislike affects (a) the social desirability of judgments (positivity bias), (b) the extent to which the target is described like an average person (normative accuracy), and (c) the extent to which the judgment reflects the given target's characteristics in particular (distinctive accuracy). Eighty-four participants watched four target persons on video, after receiving bogus feedback on how positively or negatively those targets had supposedly evaluated *them*. The participants reciprocated negative bogus evaluations showing a marked decrease in reported liking for the respective target. Most important, dislike was consistently associated with lower positivity bias, greater normative accuracy, and lower distinctive accuracy across two validation measures (i.e., self-reports and informant reports of target persons).

Keywords

person perception, interpersonal relationships, personality assessment, accuracy, response style

Judging people's personalities is a fundamental part of everyday life. For example, we think and talk about what kind of person someone is after meeting that person at a party, hearing gossip about colleagues, or watching presidential candidates in public debates. Judging people's personalities also is a part of daily business in professions such as personnel management and psychotherapy. In many instances, person judgments have profound consequences for the target persons and/or the people around them. For example, person judgments in everyday life may determine whether others want to continue having a relationship with a person, and person judgments in professional contexts may lead to treatment (e.g., therapy) and/or sanctions (e.g., imprisonment). Thus, the question of whether—and under what circumstances—person judgments are *accurate* is very important (Funder, 1995). In the present article, we use an experimental procedure to investigate whether judgmental accuracy is influenced by the perceiver's affective attitude toward the target person—that is, by how much the person making the judgment likes the person he or she judges.

The accuracy of a judgment is usually defined as the level of agreement between that judgment and some other variable that is considered to reflect "the truth." For example, people may guess each other's body weight and then their judgments may be compared with the targets' actual body weights, as measured by a scale. In person perception research, however, the situation is more complicated, mostly because a single universally accepted method to assess a person's "true" personality is not available (Funder, 1995). As a solution to this problem, it has been suggested to consider different methods simultaneously including self-reports and informant reports (Vazire, 2010). Each of these methods has its own strengths and weaknesses: For example, whereas target persons themselves have access to much more information compared to people from the social environment (e.g., their own behavior in different situations, their own inner thoughts and feelings, etc.), they are also more susceptible to self-serving or self-denigrating biases and provide only a single judgment that does not permit averaging out systematic judgment error (Hofstee, 1994). In the present study, we use two different methods to measure targets' true personalities: (a) ratings by the targets themselves and (b) averaged ratings by target-nominated informants who know the target well. This allows us to test whether the potential effects of liking on judgmental accuracy generalize across different validation measures.

In the present article, we study judgmental accuracy in terms of the "profile agreement" between ratings of a target by a perceiver on a set of items, and another profile that is thought to contain the true standings of the target on these items (as defined by one of our two validation measures). Profile

[1] Psychologische Hochschule Berlin, Berlin, Germany
[2] University of Kassel, Kassel, Germany
[3] Technische Universität Dresden, Dresden, Germany

Corresponding Author:
Johannes Zimmermann, Psychologische Hochschule Berlin, Am Köllnischen Park 2, 10179 Berlin, Germany.
Email: j.zimmermann@psychologische-hochschule.de

analyses enable us to simultaneously investigate how accuracy is influenced by factors differing between perceivers, targets, and perceiver–target dyads (Biesanz, 2010; Borkenau & Leising, 2016). When studying accuracy in terms of profile agreement, two different types of accuracy must be distinguished (Biesanz, 2010; Furr, 2008). First, *normative accuracy* is the extent to which a judgment (of a target, by a perceiver, across many traits) reflects differences in base rates between traits: People tend to attribute higher levels of some traits (e.g., "reliable" as compared to "deceitful") to targets on average, and these differences are reflected by most person judgments. Second, *distinctive accuracy* is the extent to which a judgment reflects the characteristics that set the current target apart from the average target. For example, let us assume that Paula describes Trudy as being very (5) *smart*, rather (4) *assertive*, and not at all (1) *malicious*. This profile can be predicted from two kinds of validation profiles: First, a (normative) validation profile containing the values of the *average* target on the same three traits, and second, a (distinctive) validation profile containing the trait levels of Trudy in particular. By using both predictors simultaneously in regression analysis, one may determine the *unique* contributions of each predictor, that is, normative and distinctive accuracy.

However, an important possible confound needs to be considered: It has been shown numerous times that averaged rating profiles tend to be highly socially desirable (e.g., Edwards, 1953). People tend to use positive terms, and not to use negative terms, when describing themselves and others. As a consequence, when a given profile agrees with an average of many profiles, this may be the case because the first profile is positive, or because it reflects the average target's characteristics very well, or both (Wood & Furr, 2016). The exact strengths of these two influences are unclear then. Fortunately, separating the two influences from one another is possible, using a profile containing the *rated social desirabilities* of the items as a third predictor (Rogers & Biesanz, 2015). Thus, in the present study, we predict a given perceiver's rating of a target (on a set of items) from (a) ratings of the same target on a validation measure, (b) ratings of the *average* target on the same validation measure, and (c) ratings of the individual items' social desirabilities. By simultaneously including these three predictors, the unique influence of the items' social desirabilities reflects the positivity bias of the given perceiver in judging the given target (i.e., the perceiver's tendency to describe the target positively or negatively, independent of the target's actual characteristics; West & Kenny, 2011).

The aim of the present study is to explore how a perceiver's affective attitude toward a target moderates these three influences on first impressions of targets' personalities. Whether we like or dislike someone depends on many factors, such as shared preferences (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2011), and it predicts how we perceive the person (Leising, Gallrein, & Dufner, 2014) as well as how we will interact with the person in the future (Krause, Back, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2014). Whether and how the perceiver's attitude toward the target uniquely affects accuracy and bias in person perception is largely unclear, however. For example, will Paula's view of Trudy be positively biased and/or more stereotypical when Paula likes Trudy? And would disliking Trudy reduce Paula's bias and maybe even help her recognize Trudy's unique characteristics better? These are the core questions we address in the present article, using an experimental design. By holding all other information that the perceivers receive about the targets constant, we are able to move beyond previous naturalistic studies and control for a range of possible confounds (e.g., the perceivers' being previously exposed to different information about the targets).

Our theoretical reasoning is that holding (moderately) positive attitudes toward new people constitutes a kind of "default stance" accompanied by rather automatic impression formation processes that rely on cognitive shortcuts such as stereotypes about how most people are in general (cf. Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Levine, 2014). By adopting (moderately) positive attitudes toward unacquainted others, perceivers may minimize cognitive efforts while at the same time providing largely correct judgments of most others' personalities. In fact, previous studies found that liking is associated with both greater normative accuracy (Human & Biesanz, 2011; Human, Sandstrom, Biesanz, & Dunn, 2013; Leising, Erbs, & Fritz, 2010) and greater positivity bias (Leising, Scherbaum, Locke, & Zimmermann, 2015) of person judgments. Our study is able to disentangle these two influences, thereby clarifying whether the assumed automatic impression formation process goes along with a focus on the average or the ideal target.

In contrast, when perceivers "dislike" a target (e.g., have reasons not to grant a target the default credit of trust), the impression formation process may become more deliberate, focusing more on the characteristics of the specific target at hand, and relying less on generalized knowledge about the average target (cf. Biesanz & Human, 2010; Ma-Kellams & Lerner, 2016). The existing empirical evidence in that regard is inconclusive yet, however: Tentative findings of one study suggested that dislike may be associated with increased distinctive accuracy (Leising et al., 2010), whereas two other studies suggested the opposite pattern (Human et al., 2013; Human & Biesanz, 2011). In the present study, we experimentally manipulate the initial attitudes that perceivers have toward targets, intentionally making them *less positive*. In line with some of the previous findings, and the reasoning just described, we hypothesized that this experimental manipulation would reduce normative accuracy and positivity bias and increase distinctive accuracy.

Method

We let a group of 84 perceivers judge the same four "standard targets" from video (i.e., a half-block design; Kenny, 1994). The experimental manipulation consisted of giving the perceivers bogus feedback on how the targets had supposedly evaluated *them* before. We expected that, when perceivers were told they had been negatively evaluated by a target, they would reciprocate that negative evaluation (i.e., like the target less). The research question of primary interest was how this

manipulation would affect normative accuracy, distinctive accuracy, and the positivity bias.

Sample

The total sample of perceivers comprised 92 persons, most of whom ($n = 80$) were (nonpsychology) students at a university in Germany (see Supplemental Online Material [SOM] for details on sample size planning). Eight perceivers had to be excluded because they failed to show up for the second assessment session (see below), resulting in 84 complete data sets that were used in the analyses. The mean age of the perceivers was 23.1 years ($SD = 3.52$). Fifty-eight perceivers were female. All perceivers were paid €15 for their participation.

Experimental Procedure

The study comprised three stages—two lab sessions and an online assessment in between. The data gathered online are not relevant to the present study. The first of the two lab sessions only served to make the cover story believable: Participants were asked to complete 19 standardized tasks in the lab, in front of a camera (see SOM for details). They were told that their behavior in addressing these tasks would later be evaluated by other participants. In fact, however, no such evaluations took place. Rather when the participants returned for the second lab session 2 weeks later, they were given *bogus* feedback on how four different persons (the standard targets) had supposedly evaluated them, and that it would now be their turn to evaluate the behavior of those other persons, also from video.

The four standard targets (two women, two men) were the same for all perceivers. In the videos (ranging from 7 to 10 min in duration), the targets were shown completing the same 19 tasks that the perceivers themselves had completed during the first lab session. The standard targets had been selected from a larger pool ($n = 14$) of participants in a pilot study. We ensured (a) that they differed substantially from each other in terms of their individual personality profiles (as assessed by another group of $n = 13$ perceivers) but (b) resembled each other in regard to the overall social desirability of those personality profiles as well as their rated likability, attractiveness, and performance in the tasks.

We used four experimental conditions to systematically vary the bogus feedback that the perceivers "received from" the four targets. Each perceiver was randomly assigned to one of these conditions. In each condition, the four videos appeared in a specified order such that each standard target (A, B, C, D) appeared in the first, the second, the third, and the fourth position in exactly one of the four conditions. Twenty-one perceivers were assigned to the ABCD condition, 22 perceivers to BADC, 20 perceivers to CDAB, and 21 perceivers to DCBA. Before watching and then evaluating the first of the four videos, the perceivers received the following instruction: "The person you are about to watch has watched your video and reported how much he or she liked you on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*). He or she used a value of 7." The same instruction was repeated before presenting each of the remaining three videos, only with different liking values: 8 for the second, 3 for the third, and 6 for the fourth video. This way, each of the four standard targets was paired with each of the four bogus feedback values equally often.

We were particularly interested in the effect of the third video (bogus feedback value: 3), as compared to the three other videos (average bogus feedback value: 7). The bogus feedback values of the other videos were varied around the value of 7, to make the experimental procedure more believable (three identical values might have aroused the perceivers' suspicion). Moreover, we used an average value of 7 as the "default" value (instead of 5.5, which would represent the neutral midpoint of the liking scale) because previous studies suggest that people tend to have moderately positive attitudes toward people they are exposed to for the first time (e.g., Human et al., 2013; Human & Biesanz, 2011). Based on the norm of reciprocity, we expected the standard targets' negative bogus feedback to be reciprocated by the perceivers (e.g., Gouldner, 1960; Montoya & Insko, 2008). This was the core experimental mechanism in the present study.

Directly after watching each of the four videos within their respective experimental condition, the perceivers assessed the respective target using a list of 46 person-descriptive adjectives from the natural language. This list comprised 30 adjectives assessing the Big Five personality factors (Goldberg, 1993) and 16 adjectives assessing the eight octants of the interpersonal circumplex (Wiggins, 1979). The former items were compiled by Borkenau and Ostendorf (1998); the latter items were selected from the interpersonal adjective list (Jacobs & Scholl, 2005). The perceivers used a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very*), to judge each of the standard targets in terms of how well each term described them. The participants were also asked to report how much they liked the target, using a scale range from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very*). Finally, participants were thanked and fully debriefed about the study's purpose including the bogus feedback.

Validation Measures

We employed two different validation measures: (a) self-reports and (b) informant reports of the standard targets' personalities. All of these ratings were based on the same items and response format as the ratings by the perceivers in the main sample. For each validation measure, we performed a separate statistical analysis, simultaneously predicting the perceivers' ratings of the standard targets from individual validation profiles (i.e., descriptions of the same target on the respective validation measure), from a normative validation profile (i.e., a description of the average target on the respective validation measures), and from the rated social desirability of the items. The unique contributions of the three predictors (in the order

in which they are listed here) were our indices of distinctive and normative accuracy and of positivity bias.

Individual validation profiles. The self-reports and informant reports were not planned as part of our initial study design. Rather they were collected roughly 1.5 years later, in line with recommendations that came up in the course of the review process for the present article. Self-reports were collected online by asking the standard targets to judge their own personality. Moreover, each of the four standard targets was asked to nominate three knowledgeable informants. These 12 informants provided online ratings of "their" target's personality. The informant ratings were averaged separately for each target. The median profile reliability—as assessed by the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC [2, 3]) —was .86 (range = .74–.90), suggesting that the informants sufficiently agreed with one another in judging the personality profile of their respective target.

Normative validation profiles. Person judgments tend to contain normative information, that is, assumptions regarding the distributions of trait levels in the average target. For each of the two individual validation profiles, we thus computed a corresponding normative profile capturing the trait-level differences to be expected for this particular method (see Supplemental Table S1). We derived the two normative profiles from other studies that used the same adjectives and the same response scale but included a much larger number of ratings (Gallrein, Weßels, Carlson, & Leising, 2016; Leising, Locke, Kurzius, & Zimmermann, 2016; see SOM for details).

Social Desirability

The social desirability of the 46 items had been judged with almost perfect reliability (ICC [2, 30] = .99) by a separate sample of 30 raters as part of the Leising, Locke, Kurzius, and Zimmermann's (2016) study. The raters in that study used a scale ranging from 1 (*very negative*) to 5 (*very positive*) to judge the items' desirability. As expected, the normative profiles and the profile of item desirabilities were strongly correlated across the 46 items, with $r(44) = .88$ for self-reports and $r(44) = .93$ for informant reports (see Supplemental Table S2). However, these correlations were not perfect, suggesting that some traits were perceived as rather common but undesirable, while others were perceived as uncommon but desirable. This corroborates the assumption that a profile's normativity and social desirability are at least partly distinct and need to be investigated separately (Rogers & Biesanz, 2015).

Statistical Analyses

As a first step, we tested whether the experimental manipulation was successful, that is, whether participants liked targets less when they received negative bogus feedback from them. We tested this using a multilevel model with random intercepts and slopes predicting liking from dummy-coded feedback

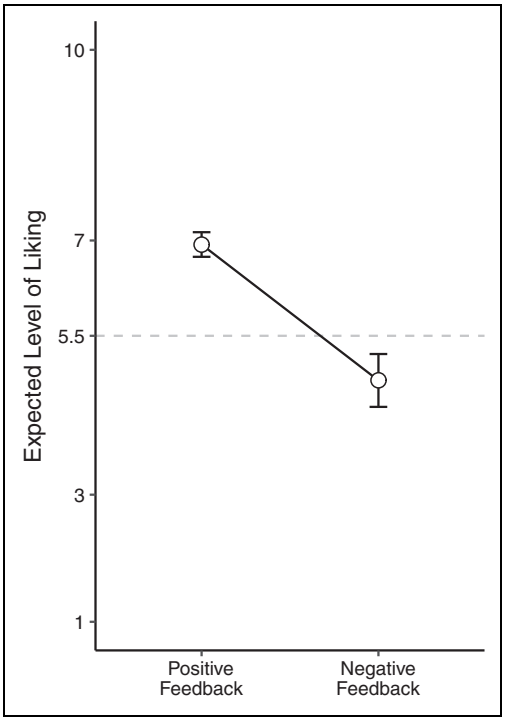

Figure 1. Effects of the feedback manipulation on perceivers' liking for the targets.

manipulation—with *positive bogus feedback* (i.e., a liking value of 6, 7, or 8) being coded as 0 and *negative bogus feedback* (i.e., a liking value of 3) being coded as 1. If the feedback manipulation was successful, the fixed effect of the slope should be statistically significant and negative. Note that from the perspective of statistical mediation analysis, this effect corresponds to "Path a" (i.e., the effect of the independent variable on the potentially mediating variable; MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007).

Next, we extended the social accuracy model (SAM; Biesanz, 2010) to simultaneously test the effect of the feedback manipulation on distinctive accuracy, normative accuracy, and the positivity bias in the perceivers' impressions of the standard targets. In line with Biesanz (2010), we formalized the SAM as a multilevel model with crossed random effects. The model can be expressed algebraically as follows:

$$Y_{pti} = \beta_{0pt} + \beta_{1pt} I_{ti} + \beta_{2pt} N_i + \beta_{3pt} S_i + \varepsilon_{pti}, \qquad (1)$$

where Y_{pti} is perceiver p's rating of target t on item i, I_{ti} is the value of item i for the individual target t on the respective validation measure, N_i is the response to item i that is expected for the average target on the respective validation measure, and S_i is the rated social desirability of item i. To improve the estimation and interpretability of coefficients, we centered all continuous predictors prior to analyses. In particular, N_i and S_i were grand mean centered, and I_{ti} was centered within items (by subtracting N_i; Biesanz, 2010). Note that we estimated this model 2 times, each time using another validation measure (i.e., self-ratings and informant ratings) for defining I_{ti} and N_i.

Table 1. Social Accuracy Model Results for the Self-Reported Validation Measure.

Parameter		Model I			Model II		
		Estimate (*SE*)	95% CI	*d*	Estimate (*SE*)	95% CI	*d*
Fixed effects							
Intercept	b_{00}	2.865*** (0.026)	[2.814, 2.915]		2.858*** (0.026)	[2.808, 2.908]	
I	b_{10}	0.131* (0.062)	[0.009, 0.252]		0.131* (0.062)	[0.009, 0.253]	
N	b_{20}	0.312*** (0.079)	[0.157, 0.466]		0.313*** (0.080)	[0.156, 0.470]	
S	b_{30}	0.342*** (0.051)	[0.241, 0.442]		0.280*** (0.052)	[0.179, 0.381]	
X	b_{01}	−0.021 (0.017)	[−0.054, 0.013]		0.007 (0.021)	[−0.034, 0.048]	
$X \times I$	b_{11}	−0.053* (0.024)	[−0.099, −0.006]	−0.288	−0.054* (0.027)	[−0.107, −0.001]	−0.300
$X \times N$	b_{21}	0.239*** (0.048)	[0.145, 0.333]	0.759	0.235*** (0.057)	[0.123, 0.347]	0.757
$X \times S$	b_{31}	−0.445*** (0.040)	[−0.523, −0.366]	−1.245	−0.198*** (0.042)	[−0.280, −0.116]	−0.665
L	b_{02}				0.013* (0.006)	[0.001, 0.024]	
$L \times I$	b_{12}				−0.001 (0.007)	[−0.014, 0.013]	−0.012
$L \times N$	b_{22}				−0.002 (0.015)	[−0.032, 0.028]	−0.023
$L \times S$	b_{32}				0.115*** (0.011)	[0.093, 0.138]	1.325
Random effects							
Perceiver variability							
Intercept	$SD(u_{0p})$	0.130			0.129		
I	$SD(u_{1p})$	0.034			0.031		
N	$SD(u_{2p})$	0.192			0.199		
S	$SD(u_{3p})$	0.209			0.203		
Target variability							
Intercept	$SD(u_{0t})$	0.039			0.039		
I	$SD(u_{1t})$	0.121			0.121		
N	$SD(u_{2t})$	0.144			0.145		
S	$SD(u_{3t})$	0.082			0.086		
Dyadic variability							
Intercept	$SD(u_{0(pt)})$	0.029			0.000		
I	$SD(u_{1(pt)})$	0.095			0.093		
N	$SD(u_{2(pt)})$	0.130			0.108		
S	$SD(u_{3(pt)})$	0.212			0.133		
Residual	$SD(\varepsilon_{pti})$	0.878			0.878		

Note. Estimates are based on 84 perceivers, 4 targets, and 46 items. Correlations between random effects were freely estimated but are omitted in this table. *I* = individual validation profile; *N* = normative validation profile; *S* = social desirability of items; *X* = negative feedback manipulation; *L* = liking; *SD* = standard deviation; CI = confidence interval; *SE* = standard error; *d* = standardized effect size.
#*p* < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

The regression coefficients β_{0pt}, β_{1pt}, β_{2pt}, and β_{3pt} may be expressed as a function of fixed and random effects:

$$\begin{aligned}\beta_{0pt} &= \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}X_{pt} + u_{0p} + u_{0t} + u_{0(pt)},\\ \beta_{1pt} &= \beta_{10} + \beta_{11}X_{pt} + u_{1p} + u_{1t} + u_{1(pt)},\\ \beta_{2pt} &= \beta_{20} + \beta_{21}X_{pt} + u_{2p} + u_{2t} + u_{2(pt)},\\ \beta_{3pt} &= \beta_{30} + \beta_{31}X_{pt} + u_{3p} + u_{3t} + u_{3(pt)}.\end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

The fixed effects β_{10}, β_{20}, and β_{30} represent the expected level of distinctive accuracy, normative accuracy, and positivity bias, respectively, across perceivers and targets in the positive feedback condition. The fixed effects β_{11}, β_{21}, and β_{31} represent the expected *change* in distinctive accuracy, normative accuracy, and positivity bias, respectively, that is due to the feedback manipulation (X_{pt}). These latter ones are the coefficients of primary interest in our study and correspond to "Path c" in statistical mediation analysis (i.e., the total effect of the independent variable on the criterion variable). The *u* indices represent random effects, that is, deviations from the fixed effects that are specific for perceivers (*p*), targets (*t*), and dyads of perceivers and targets (the latter deviations also include residual error).

In a final step, we tested whether the level of liking reported by perceivers predicts distinctive accuracy, normative accuracy, and positivity bias above and beyond the experimental manipulation. We tested this by including the perceivers' (grand mean centered) level of liking as an additional predictor in the four equations presented in Equation 2, yielding additional fixed effects β_{02}, β_{12}, β_{22}, and β_{32}. From the perspective of statistical mediation analysis, these effects correspond to "Path b" (i.e., the effect of the mediating variable on the criterion variable while controlling for the independent variable). In fact, if the experimental manipulation does have the expected negative effect on the perceivers' liking for the targets (Path a), a positive effect of liking while controlling for the effect of the manipulation (Path b) would indicate that liking mediates the effect of the feedback manipulation on person perception.

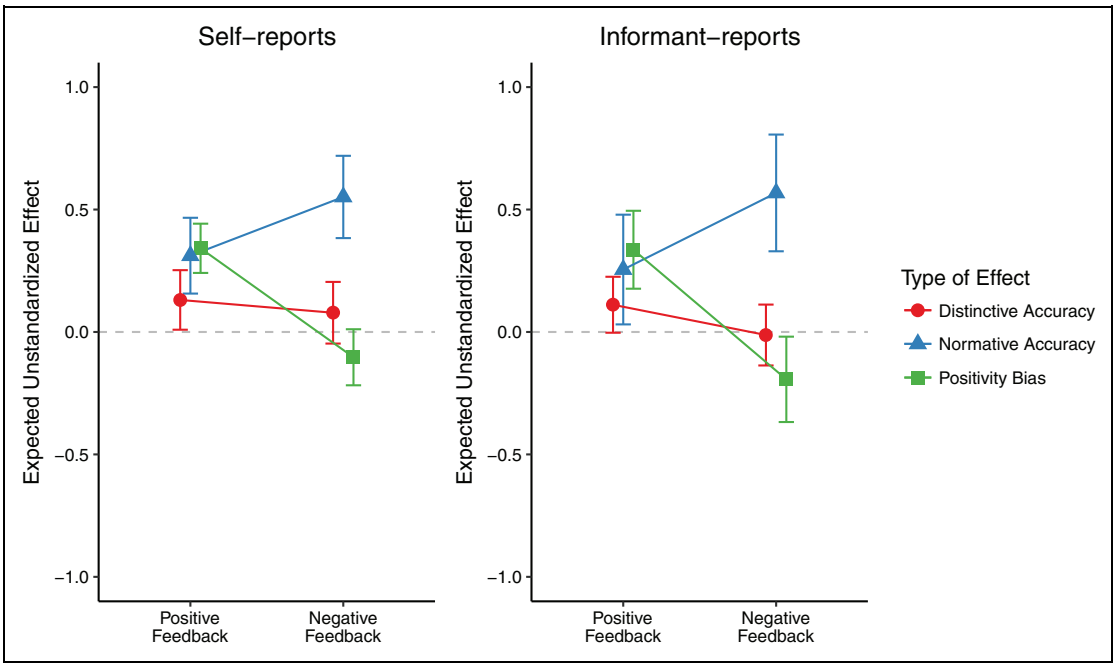

Figure 2. Effects of the feedback manipulation on bias and accuracy of perceivers' impressions of the targets' personality defined by self-reports (left panel) and informant reports (right panel).

All models were estimated with restricted maximum likelihood estimation using the package "lme4" (Bates, Mächler, Bolker, & Walker, 2015) from the statistical environment R 3.3.1 (R Core Team, 2016). We computed p values and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for fixed effects based on the Wald method. In addition, we computed standardized effect sizes (d) for selected fixed effects. More details including the raw data and scripts for reproducing the reported results can be found in the SOM.

Results

The bogus feedback was highly successful in changing the perceivers' attitudes toward the targets (Path a): While perceivers said they did like the targets after receiving positive feedback, $b_{00} = 6.93$, 95% CI [6.74, 7.13], that attitude became much more negative after receiving negative feedback, $b_{10} = -2.14$, 95% CI [−2.51, −1.77], $d = -1.09$ (see Figure 1).[1] Note that the perceivers' average liking for the standard targets who allegedly liked them closely approximated the bogus feedback value (=7) that we had used as a kind of "default response." In contrast, although the perceivers' liking for standard targets who allegedly disliked them was much lower (= 4.79), it was not quite as low as the standard targets' alleged liking for them (=3). So, reciprocity was strong, but not perfect.

Table 1 presents the results for predicting the perceivers' impressions of the four standard targets from self-reported validation profiles and the socially desirable profile: All three predictors showed a significant and positive influence on the perceivers' impressions when the bogus feedback was positive. That is, we found evidence for distinctive accuracy, normative accuracy, and positivity bias across perceivers and targets (see b_{10}, b_{20}, and b_{30} in the first columns of Table 1). The feedback manipulation significantly moderated the influences of all three predictors (Path c): It led to slightly decreased distinctive accuracy, moderately increased normative accuracy, and strongly decreased positivity bias (see b_{11}, b_{21}, and b_{31} in the first columns of Table 1 and left panel of Figure 2). The follow-up analysis including liking as an additional predictor suggested that liking strongly affected positivity bias above and beyond the feedback manipulation but did not affect distinctive and normative accuracy (Path b; see b_{12}, b_{22}, and b_{32} in the last columns of Table 1). Thus, only the decrease in positivity bias was (partly) mediated by lower liking.

The pattern of results with regard to informant reports was similar (see Table 2 and the right panel of Figure 2): The feedback manipulation led to moderately decreased distinctive accuracy, moderately increased normative accuracy, and strongly decreased positivity bias. Again, only the decrease in positivity bias was (partly) mediated by lower liking.

Discussion

The present study investigated how a perceiver's attitude toward a target affects accuracy and bias in forming first impressions of a target's personality. Our experimental manipulation was highly successful in reducing the extent to which perceivers liked the targets and thus can be recommended for future research along the same lines. Moreover, the effects of the experimental manipulation as well as of the perceivers' liking on person perception were highly consistent across

Table 2. Social Accuracy Model Results for the Informant-Reported Validation Measure.

		Model I			Model II		
Parameter		Estimate (*SE*)	95% CI	*d*	Estimate (*SE*)	95% CI	*d*
Fixed effects							
Intercept	b_{00}	2.843*** (0.022)	[2.800, 2.887]		2.837*** (0.022)	[2.794, 2.881]	
I	b_{10}	0.111# (0.058)	[−0.003, 0.226]		0.114# (0.059)	[−0.001, 0.228]	
N	b_{20}	0.256* (0.114)	[0.032, 0.479]		0.259* (0.114)	[0.035, 0.483]	
S	b_{30}	0.335*** (0.081)	[0.177, 0.494]		0.271*** (0.071)	[0.131, 0.411]	
X	b_{01}	−0.019 (0.017)	[−0.052, 0.013]		0.005 (0.021)	[−0.037, 0.046]	
$X \times I$	b_{11}	−0.125*** (0.036)	[−0.194, −0.055]	−0.497	−0.133** (0.041)	[−0.214, −0.052]	−0.529
$X \times N$	b_{21}	0.310*** (0.059)	[0.195, 0.426]	0.627	0.297*** (0.072)	[0.156, 0.438]	0.596
$X \times S$	b_{31}	−0.528*** (0.052)	[−0.629, −0.426]	−1.194	−0.269*** (0.057)	[−0.381, −0.158]	−0.681
L	b_{02}				0.011# (0.006)	[−0.000, 0.023]	
$L \times I$	b_{12}				−0.006 (0.010)	[−0.026, 0.014]	−0.079
$L \times N$	b_{22}				−0.008 (0.019)	[−0.045, 0.030]	−0.053
$L \times S$	b_{32}				0.122*** (0.015)	[0.092, 0.152]	1.053
Random effects							
Perceiver variability							
Intercept	$SD(u_{0p})$	0.132			0.130		
I	$SD(u_{1p})$	0.024			0.045		
N	$SD(u_{2p})$	0.257			0.266		
S	$SD(u_{3p})$	0.230			0.249		
Target variability							
Intercept	$SD(u_{0t})$	0.029			0.029		
I	$SD(u_{1t})$	0.111			0.110		
N	$SD(u_{2t})$	0.213			0.212		
S	$SD(u_{3t})$	0.145			0.122		
Dyadic variability							
Intercept	$SD(u_{0(pt)})$	0.018			0.033		
I	$SD(u_{1(pt)})$	0.185			0.182		
N	$SD(u_{2(pt)})$	0.268			0.265		
S	$SD(u_{3(pt)})$	0.270			0.201		
Residual	$SD(\varepsilon_{pti})$	0.869			0.869		

Note. Estimates are based on 84 perceivers, 4 targets, and 46 items. Correlations between random effects were freely estimated but are omitted in this table. *I* = individual validation profile; *N* = normative validation profile; *S* = social desirability of items; *X* = negative feedback manipulation; *L* = liking; *SD* = standard deviation; CI = confidence interval; *SE* = standard error; *d* = standardized effect size.
#$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

self-reported and informant-reported validation measures. However, whereas our hypothesis that dislike reduces the positivity bias was clearly supported, we failed to find the expected negative effect on normative accuracy and the expected positive effect on distinctive accuracy.

In fact, our most unambiguous finding was that the negative bogus feedback led to a strongly reduced positivity bias and that this effect was at least partly mediated by lower liking. This is in line with previous studies suggesting that liking is a strong predictor of how much a perceiver will attribute positive characteristics, and not attribute negative characteristics, to a target (Leising et al., 2010, 2015). However, several features of the present study make its findings noteworthy: First, this was a zero-acquaintance study, all perceivers received the same information about the targets' behavior (because they all watched the same videos), and the experimental manipulation was within target. Thus, the effects of liking that we found may not be attributed to (a) targets differing in their actual personalities or (b) perceivers differing in what information about targets they were exposed to (except for the bogus feedback). Second, this was the first study into these issues that used an experimental attitude manipulation. Due to our research design, it may be firmly concluded that the formation of affective attitudes actually *preceded* the perceivers' judgments of the targets' personalities and not the other way round. Third, we studied judgments of and by real people, by means of natural language terms, and based on observations of actual behavior. Thus, our design entails considerably higher ecological validity as compared to other studies using only hypothetical or public persons as targets (e.g., Leising et al., 2015). Fourth, as we controlled for normative accuracy, the experimental manipulation's effect on the positivity bias cannot be alternatively explained in terms of (reduced) application of knowledge about how most people are in general (Rogers & Biesanz, 2015). Thus, our study suggests that liking a person implies portraying that person in line with an image of an ideal (not an average!) person, whereas liking a person less may remove those "rose-colored glasses." Note that this has consequences for a broad range of situations in which people judge others' personalities, including psychological research. For example,

the average participant in person perception research (e.g., informant) will probably like the target to some extent, and thus profile agreement with other perceivers will be inflated simply by a shared tendency to see targets positively (cf. Wood & Furr, 2016).

The effects of the negative feedback manipulation on distinctive and normative accuracy were contrary to our hypothesis and generally not mediated by liking. What seems most noteworthy is that the negative feedback manipulation led to reduced distinctive accuracy. Although this finding contradicted our hypothesis that a more negative attitude may increase attention to, and systematic thinking about, the unique characteristics of a target's personality (cf. Biesanz & Human, 2010; Ma-Kellams & Lerner, 2016), it fits well with the results of two previous studies based on short dyadic interactions (Human et al., 2013; Human & Biesanz, 2011). One explanation could be that the negative feedback actually *reduced* the perceivers' motivation to attend to and understand the target person. For example, as the perceivers knew that they would probably never meet the targets in real life, they may have reacted with *disinterest* to targets who allegedly disliked them. In situations where future interactions with such targets are possible or even unavoidable, one may expect a different pattern of results (e.g., the increased attention that we hypothesized in the present study). Another explanation could be that the negative feedback made the perceivers more skeptical about the self-presentations of the targets. In other words, perceivers may have not "bought" the specific self-images that targets were trying to convey in the lab tasks (whereas those self-images are probably reflected both by the targets' self-ratings of their own personalities and the ratings by the targets' acquaintances). In any case, as liking did not mediate the effects on distinctive accuracy, the underlying mechanism remains unclear.

Our study has several limitations, which should be addressed in future investigations. First, although our sample of perceivers was adequately large, we only included four standard targets. Moreover, perceivers and targets shared important sociodemographic features (e.g., age, education, and culture). Both aspects may have limited generalizability. Second, although the participants did reciprocate the targets' alleged attitudes in direction, they did not do so in extent: Whereas the standard targets' bogus feedback was clearly negative (a value of 3 on a liking scale ranging from 1 to 10), the participants only responded with slightly negative attitudes ($M = 4.79$), on average. As a consequence, we could only compare moderately positive attitudes with slightly negative attitudes in the present study. Future studies should attempt to experimentally induce even more negative—or more positive—perceiver attitudes in order to capture the whole range of the liking spectrum. This seems important because liking may easily have curvilinear effects on person perception (e.g., extremely positive attitudes may reduce distinctive accuracy). Third, our design was artificial in the sense that there was no possibility of (future) interactions between perceivers and targets. It may be the case that dislike has different consequences in real-life interactions, especially when future contact cannot be avoided. Fourth, as liking did not mediate the effect of the negative bogus feedback on accuracy, it seems possible that the feedback manipulation may have induced a range of other psychological processes (e.g., threatened the perceivers' self-views). A more extensive experimental research program is needed to clarify which mechanisms are empirically involved in producing effects of dislike on accuracy and bias of person perception (Bullock, Green, & Ha, 2010).

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Supplemental Material

The supplemental material is available in the online version of the article and at https://osf.io/6vpk8/.

Note

1. Perceivers' gender, targets' gender, and their interaction did not significantly affect liking and did not moderate the effect of the feedback manipulation on liking.

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Author Biographies

Johannes Zimmermann is a professor at the Psychologische Hochschule Berlin. His research focuses on psychological assessment, person perception, personality pathology, and psychotherapy.

Simon Schindler is a research associate at the Psychology Department in the University of Kassel. His research focuses on existential threat, social norms, lie detection, and dishonest behavior.

Geraldine Klaus is a PhD student at the Center for Environmental Systems Research (CESR) of the University of Kassel. Her research focuses on lay persons' perception of climate engineering technologies.

Daniel Leising is a professor at the Psychology Department of Technical University Dresden (TUD). His research focuses on person perception, interpersonal behavior, and personality pathology.

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